

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A STERN CHASE.

A STORY IN THREE PARTS.

BY MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

THE FIRST PART.

CHAPTER X. A WAY OF ESCAPE.

"WHAT is it, dearest? What has happened?" asked Hugh, as he met Ines at the appointed time and place. "Something ill, I fear, although it has done me this good."

It needed, indeed, but a glance to assure Hugh that the tidings he had been summoned to hear were evil. The face he had seen in the theatre was hardly more full of fear than that which he looked upon now. Ines did not speak at once; she seemed to be striving with an emotion too powerful to find words. She had summoned Hugh, and now that he had come she was unequal to the task she had imposed upon herself. A sleepless night had helped to unnerve her.

"Try to recover yourself, my darling," said Hugh tenderly, kissing her cold little hands which trembled in his, "and tell me what has occurred. Don't fear; remember I am with you."

"I will—I do. But how shall I say what I have come to say? At all events, you will believe that it is my own sentence of death. Henrique, it is all over; we must bid each other good-bye and part."

"Ines!"

"Yes; I tell you the truth. I tell you what must be."

"It never shall be. But why—why do you say such an impossible thing? What has happened since I saw you? Was there any other reason besides Doña Mercedes's illness for your father not receiving me? Has anything been discovered?"

"Nothing; but I have come to know

that you must fail—that you can never, never gain my father's consent. Believe me, oh, believe me, and do not question me. I cannot tell you all the reasons I have for being perfectly sure of what I say; some are facts, and others are only feelings, but all are certainties. It is useless to strive against our fate. We must part, and I entreat you to go—to go at once."

"To go! Where?"

He spoke at random. He was so astonished at her words, that he hardly knew what he said.

"Away from the island, away from Cuba, back to your country, where you will be——"

She stopped; she had been on the point of saying, "Where you will be safe," and thus betraying herself.

"Yes; where I shall be——?"

"Happy, That is what I meant—what I tried to say. Go back to England, to your father and your sister, and think no more of me. I do not mean forget me all at once; I cannot bear to mean that; but do not think of me as you have been thinking, for it never could have been. I knew it all the time, and now everything is at an end."

"Ines," said Hugh sternly, "you must make me understand you; I really do not yet. And I shall be the more readily made to understand you if you will tell me one thing, plainly, and at once. Do you love me to-day as you loved me when we spoke together here for the first time?"

"I do; indeed I do."

She spoke with a deep sob, but there were no tears in her eyes.

"Well, then, that being so, and you my promised wife, and there being no reason why you should not keep your promise, why do you say these wild and senseless things to me? Who has been frightening

you? Has Doña Mercedes said anything? She was not cordial to me when I met her last. Tell me, Ines; pray tell me."

The misdirection of Hugh's apprehensions was a help to Ines. She had repeated to herself a thousand times that at any cost, even that of misinterpretation of herself, she must avert his suspicions from Norberto. To get Hugh out of the country without betraying her great motive—this was the task the girl had set herself.

"Doña Mercedes has not spoken to me; but I know she would be against us. She is angry with me now, and she will soon stir up my father's anger, because I have let her see that I do not like Norberto, and she is all for him. She meant to frighten me by her manner to you; she kept her room all yesterday, and I was not allowed to see her; before I see her again she will have said what she means to say to my father, and there will be nothing left for me but to obey their commands, or go at once into the convent."

"But, my own Ines," remonstrated Hugh, "if Doña Mercedes has not spoken, how do you know that she suspects us? What reason have you for thinking that she meant to frighten you by her manner to me? I may have displeased her unintentionally. Think, dearest; we have not exchanged a dozen sentences in her presence. It is impossible that she can suspect us."

"It is certain that she does. Oh, Henrique, why will you try to persuade me out of what I know? My stepmother's character is no mystery to me, and I am certain of what I say. This very day my fate will be decided."

"I accept your reading of the case then, but still I don't see why we should despair. There is nothing changed since we first settled our plan of action; except indeed that each hour makes you dearer to me. If she suspects us, it will but hasten events. I shall still have the same proposal to lay before your father, and there will still be the same reasons why he should listen to me."

"Ah!" said Ines, with a bitter sigh, "you cannot understand. You are a man, and in your country, I have heard, women, even girls, are free and may marry whom they will. But you must believe, though you don't understand me; for if you do not, you will make me far more miserable than I am now—because I shall have brought trouble upon you."

"Trouble! What trouble could come upon me that would equal what you are trying to make me take from your own hand? Your father can do no more than refuse me, and you want me to leave you without asking him for you! Why should I not try to overcome the prejudices of Doña Mercedes? When she knows for certain that nothing will induce you to listen to your cousin, that there is no possible chance for him, I cannot but think she may listen to me."

"Henrique, what shall I say? How can I persuade you? You know my father and my stepmother only a few days; can you tell what they will do better than I, who have known them all my life? Have I not told you that Doña Mercedes hates me, and that if you could have got my father's consent before she suspected that you loved me, she would have tried to make him go back from his word?"

"Would he have done so?"

"I think not; that was my only hope, for the little time I had any. I am almost sure my father wants me to marry my cousin, more on account of his promise to my poor mother than for any other reason; and so, I did hope, for a very little time, that when he knew that could not be, he might give his word to you, and keep to it as firmly. But that is all over now; he will never listen to you. By this time she has made him promise, and we must part. They will tell me to-day—I am sure of it—that I have to choose at once, and I shall tell them that I have chosen."

"And go into the convent, to take a false vow and live a false life? I know little or nothing about your creed, Ines, but I do not think it would sanction or pardon that."

His words struck her to the heart. What had Sister Santa Gertrudis said to her about the only motives that could be acceptable to the great Judge of her actions, to the infallible Reader of her soul? She wrung her hands wildly, and burst into tears, to the helpless distress of Hugh, and also of poor Teresita, who, bewildered by the appearances which the conversation, of which she did not understand a word, was assuming, implored her to be calm and to come away.

"A few minutes," she said to the old woman, "and then I will go. See, I am not crying any more." Then to Hugh: "What you say is true. God forgive me! But you cannot help me, and we must part here and now."

"Never, and nowhere, while I have life."

Hugh strained her passionately to his breast, and held her there, while he bade Teresita fear nothing, for he would save her child from all harm, and make her happy.

"I have heard you, dearest," he said rapidly, "and now you must hear me. All that you have said fails to convince me that your father's consent cannot be gained; but I yield the point. I will not ask it."

She started from his embrace, and caught Teresita's arm to steady herself. He quietly took her hand again, and led her a few steps onward.

"I will not ask it," Hugh repeated. "We love each other; you are mine, until death do us part, and no one shall take you from me. I will take you away, my darling. You will trust me, and come with me, I know, because you love me; and when you are my wife, and safe from every danger, your father will forgive you and me too, and be glad to know that you are happy."

"Take me away!" She spoke in a faint, low tone, and shrank away from him for an instant. "Take me away? How?"

"I do not know. I cannot tell you until I have thought over all this. But I shall take you away, my darling; be sure of that. And you will come with me, fearing nothing, trusting me in all things, will you not? We will go to England; to my sister, of whom I have told you." Seeing her breathless agitation, he went on very calmly: "I know you must recoil from the idea of leaving your home secretly, Ines, and I abhor the necessity; but it is the only thing we can do. I know that I am asking you to do an unheard-of thing, but we are in an unheard-of position. You will go with me?"

She closed her eyes, and grew so pale that Hugh thought she was fainting; but she recovered herself, and said:

"I will do whatever you wish. I have no strength to urge you further."

"And you know—you must know, Ines, that we could not part. Forget, dearest, that you ever thought of such a thing, and let us think instead of how we are to be for ever together."

She was trembling, but collected, and Hugh strove to give her courage by his decided tone. He little knew that his bold proposal, more audacious and dangerous in this case than in that of a European young lady, was a great relief to her. He would

not give her up, he would not leave the island, and unless he did so he would not be safe from Norberto. The motive of her entreaty was the one plea she dared not urge. That entreaty had failed, and she was torn between the joy of her redoubled faith in her lover's love, and her terror of his danger. But, to save him without losing him; to save him and herself too; to secure the bliss of being his wife, and to avoid the vengeance of her terrible cousin—this would indeed be a triumph. There was no room in her mind for a notion of risk or disgrace; there was only the wonder, the awe of a captive who had just seen his prison thrown open, and the light of heaven streaming upon him. Hugh was equally surprised and touched by her manner of submitting to his impetuous demand. There was entire innocence in its absolute trust, and yet an unconscious revelation of her forlornness. It was a very worthy and manly love that filled his heart and fired his tongue as he poured out his thanks, vows, and protestations, and he was heard with rapture which for the moment banished the dread that beset Ines, and made Hugh oblivious of the difficulties attending the fulfilment of his design.

Teresita, profoundly mystified, but still confident that in some way the discomfiture of Doña Mercedes and Norberto, if not their death—which would be so much better—was being compassed, was the only one of the party alive to the flight of time. She warned Ines that she must not stay much longer, and Hugh hastened to say his final words.

"In a few hours, in a day at latest, I shall know what can be done. I will not try to see you, dearest; we must not run the slightest risk now. But to-morrow morning, and the day after, I shall come to this spot at seven exactly, and if you have anything to tell me let Teresita meet me here. On the third day, let her come in any case. All shall be settled by that time, and she shall bring you a letter from me. Only one thing I must know. Can you leave the house with her at any time, freely, and unquestioned?"

"No. I never go out with her except to the cathedral, to the early mass—where you saw me first—and to the convent. I am certain I shall not be free for an hour now."

"And are your visits to the convent invariably early, and always brief?"

"I do not stay more than an hour

generally, and I always go there in the morning. I am doing some embroidery for the church."

Then Ines remembered the promise she had made to Sister Santa Gertrudis, and bethought her—even at that moment not without a pang of remorse—of the opportunity which it might afford her. Before she could tell Hugh of this he put another question:

"How long could you be out of the house without being missed?"

"Not more than two hours, unless I had gone to the convent for a whole day. I have promised to do that, for my work has to be finished by a certain time, but I did not name any day."

"So that you can be sure of several hours of freedom on one day not named?"

"Yes, if Doña Mercedes does not forbid me to go."

"Ask her at once, dearest. Make sure of that one point, and I will answer for the rest. Let Teresita bring me to-morrow morning the one word, 'Yes' or 'No', and I shall know how to act. Don't fix the time until the third day from this—the day on which Teresita will bring you my letter. In it you will find full instructions. Don't fear, and don't fail me."

"Henrique," said Ines, clinging to him suddenly, while again the look of faintness that had already alarmed him came into her face, "promise me two things—promise them to me in the most solemn and binding way you can. Have you any saints in your religion, or any vows?"

"Certainly; we have both saints and vows."

"Then take a vow to me, that if anything happens to prevent my going with you, no matter what it may be, or how it may occur; whether it be my fault, or the fault of someone else, whether I am found out and sent away, or that I let you know it is all hopeless; you will leave the island at once, without any attempt to see me. You hesitate! Ah, Henrique, you do not know what you are making me suffer."

"But you are asking so hard a thing."

"I know; but however hard, it must be done. Be assured that if anything prevents my going with you, no second chance can ever come; there is nothing more certain than that, and take the vow to me. Unless you do, I cannot be calm; I shall betray myself, I know."

Her extreme agitation conquered Hugh's reluctance.

"I promise," he said. "I take the vow you ask me for."

"By the saints of your religion?"

"By the saints of my religion. But you said I was to promise you two things. What is the second?"

"That Teresita shall not suffer for what we are going to attempt. She is a slave, remember, in reality, though not regarded as the other slaves are, and she might be ill-treated if she was suspected after I was gone."

"Do not fear that, dearest. Teresita shall be protected, and rewarded for her love of you. I don't see my way yet, but you may rely upon her safety. Only trust me, darling, in everything, and all will be well."

"I do trust you in everything." For the first time a faint smile illumined her lovely face.

"And love me, Ines?"

"With all my heart."

Doña Mercedes and Ines met at breakfast, and there was nothing in the manner of either to indicate to an observer that their relations were strained. One glance at her father showed Ines that nothing had been said to him. Don Saturnino was as complacent, as amiable, as well satisfied that all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds, as it was his custom to be. He was in particularly good spirits because his wife had shaken off her indisposition so quickly—for he hated her absence, and had the dislike of an easy-going man to the dislocating effect of even slight illness in a house—and he took almost as much notice of Ines as on the day when she had been alone with him at breakfast; yet he did not perceive that she was looking ill, and that she disguised her inability to eat by indulging her little brother in his teasing and troublesome ways. Not a shade of her demeanour escaped the observation of Doña Mercedes, but the scene of the previous evening accounted for all. She had made up her mind how Ines was to be treated, and no sooner were they alone than she proceeded to act on her resolution.

"I wish to speak to you, Ines," she said, in the cold, even tone which her step-daughter dreaded; "be so good as to remain here."

Ines, who had been about to leave the room, resumed her seat. Her heart beat fast; she said within herself:

"Now it has come."

Doña Mercedes, reclining in a rocking-

chair, and swaying her fan in time to its slow movement, kept her eyes mercilessly fixed on the girl's face.

"While you conducted yourself with the propriety which I require in a member of my household, I did not interfere with you, Ines, as I think you must admit. But you have ceased to conduct yourself with that propriety, and now I interfere."

"I do not understand you," faltered Ines.

"You understand me perfectly. Your cousin Norberto has had occasion to complain to me of your demeanour towards him, your betrothed husband. It is fortunate for you that he carried his complaint to me, and not to your father. Hush! Be silent, if you please." Ines had half risen from her chair, and attempted to protest. "I am offended, of course, by your departure from modesty and manners, but your father would be grieved."

Impossible to describe the cold and cutting contempt with which she drew this fine distinction for the wounding of the motherless girl. But she did not dream of the buckler that intercepted the dart, and flung it off into empty air.

"Not only have you behaved with positive incivility to Norberto, but you have insulted him by talking to the Señor Rodney and his friend in a language which he does not speak. I have always disapproved of your having been suffered to learn English; your betrothed husband is perfectly in his right in objecting to your conversing in it with strangers. These gentlemen speak French. When it is necessary for you to talk with either of them, you are, for the future, to do so in a language which all present understand. If I am not mistaken, I have made the Señor Rosslyn aware that I disapproved of his addressing you in English as he did at the theatre, and he will not again make a similar mistake."

Ines had listened to this reproof, delivered in a tone of mingled disdain and authority, with conflicting feelings. Natural indignation was one of these, but it was hardly so strong as surprise, and much less strong than relief.

Was this all Doña Mercedes had to say to her? Had she entirely escaped detection? Should she have to send Teresita to-morrow to say to Hugh the welcome "No", which might make what he had to do so much easier? Not knowing that Doña Mercedes had overheard Norberto's violent language to her on the previous evening, and was now acting on a plan concerted

with him to remedy the blunder into which his savage temper had led him, she unsuspectingly accepted the aspect of affairs which Doña Mercedes presented to her.

While her heart was throbbing, and her ears were tingling at the words addressed to her, Ines was still able to give a thought to the hopeless barrier that would have been raised between herself and Hugh had those words been spoken a little earlier, and to feel a thrill of exultation at their utter impotence now. She sat perfectly still, with downcast eyes, and uttered not one word.

"She is strangely insensible," thought Doña Mercedes, "or she is a better actress than I took her for. She was unmistakably terrified last night, and now she seems merely sullen."

"You understand me, I hope, Ines?" she continued. "Your father has invited these strangers to accompany us to Valladolid, and you are so to conduct yourself as to give no umbrage to your betrothed husband."

The malicious repetition of this phrase provoked Ines out of the silence that was beginning to exasperate Doña Mercedes. She stood up, walked to the door, and faced her stepmother.

"I have heard you," she said slowly. "You have sufficiently insulted me in the name of my cousin Norberto. I tell you now, as I have told him, that I will never be his wife."

Doña Mercedes smiled.

"That remains to be seen. Your betrothed husband he is at present, and I, at least, shall insist on his being treated as such. Take care that you do not make it necessary for me to request your father to give you his orders on the subject. I wish to spare you that humiliation."

"And I wish my father would let me tell him now what my decision is."

"Do not use big words, child. Your father, not you, will fix the time for your formal agreement to the contract made for you by your mother, and sanctioned by all your family."

"I will never marry my cousin. Nothing on earth shall make me do it."

"Observe, if you please, that there is no present question of the kind, and be so good as to attend to what I have said. You may go."

Doña Mercedes had never before ventured to speak to Ines in the tone of that last sentence. The hatred and spite of it made the girl shiver.

"I knew she hated me ever since Ramon was born," she said to herself, as she left the presence of her now revealed enemy, "but I did not know how much."

If Ines could have divined that Doña Mercedes's secret fear was lest his daughter should speak to Don Saturnino, because she felt tolerably certain that she would gain her cause, the discovery might have changed her future.

Doña Mercedes de Rodas and Ines were seen together that day by all the fashionable world of Santiago de Cuba, and they were, as usual, much observed. They were also, as usual, perfectly polite to each other. Hugh Rosslyn and Henry Rodney were among the persons who met them at the Retreta, and the former saw at once that Doña Mercedes had changed her hand. Her bow was graciousness itself. The gentlemen exchanged a few words with the ladies, from which it appeared that Hugh was going on an inland excursion for a couple of days.

Teresita was exact in her appearance at the rendezvous on the following morning, and the word she had to say to Hugh Rosslyn was "No".

A DELICATE SITUATION.

I MUST commence this narrative with a most painful admission—my wife is a confirmed kleptomaniac. In all other respects she is an admirable woman, though I say it who shouldn't. She is beautiful—at least, in my eyes; she is comparatively young, though perhaps she might not like me to be too precise on this point; she has troops of friends, and no lack of anything that a husband in comfortable circumstances, and devotedly attached to her, can supply; and yet, owing to some distressing mental disorder, she is continually bringing home other people's property.

Nothing, I am quite sure, could be further from her gentle disposition than the vice of covetousness. She does not take things because she wants them, or in order to obtain a cheap gratification. So far as I can see, she is subject merely to the same propensity as the jackdaw.

I solemnly affirm that she has no notion of wrongdoing. She pilfers with the innocence of the dove, cooing all the while with that soft voice of hers which would disarm the most hardened stickler for the rights of property; and when she sees me take anything to restore it to the lawful

owner, she invariably regards me with mute reproach.

I first discovered her malady during our honeymoon, which was spent in the north of England. We were in a jeweller's shop at the time, and a diamond ring had mysteriously disappeared. Parenthetically, let me observe that, although Maria will, at a pinch, take articles of no earthly value, she prefers jewellery, as being at once portable and pleasant to look upon. The man declared she had stolen the ring. While I was pouring upon him a flood of abuse, and she was entreating me to spare him, she became so agitated at the sight of my indignation as to have recourse to her handkerchief. As she drew it from her pocket something fell on the floor. Following a triumphant dart of the jeweller's hand, I looked, and, lo! there was the ring. That was the first of many painful moments. Yet I can confidently say that, instead of diminishing my love, they have increased it, for they have added to my other feelings a great pity for her who is so grievously afflicted.

There never was a less nervous woman than Maria; herein, I fear, lies the hopelessness of her case. If I could detect even the quiver of an eyelid—and what charming eyes she has, to be sure!—as she quietly appropriates what belongs to another, I might be able to take courage. But, alas! the smile never leaves her pretty face, her tones never falter, her hand goes untravelling on its stealthy way as if it were impelled by some invisible force external to herself, and then the horrid deed is done. Oh, what agonies I have endured, watching without the power of stopping her! What shame, what pity, what horror lest she should be caught in the act! I always feel as guilty as if I were her accomplice.

Night after night, when she is asleep, I have long made a practice of searching her pockets, and then of creeping downstairs to examine her private cabinets. The number of things I have found secreted in one corner or another is enough to make my hair stand on end when I think of them. Whether Maria ever misses them, whether she knows that I have sent them back to their owners, I have never been able to ascertain, but she has neither remonstrated nor said a word on the subject to me. I have noticed, however, that her hiding-places are changed from time to time, which looks as if she were not altogether satisfied with them.

About a year ago, Mrs. Arbuthnot, an

acquaintance of ours, lost a valuable bracelet, which I felt quite sure Maria had taken. But I never could find it, though I searched the house from top to bottom. Mrs. Arbutnot had her suspicions, I could see, and this drove me nearly frantic, not only with thinking of what had become of the bracelet, but also with trying to discover a remedy for the existing state of affairs.

At last I hit upon what struck me as a really good idea. Like cures like, I argued; if I were to introduce into the house another kleptomaniac, would not Maria become disgusted and alter her ways? A bad habit in ourselves may be tolerated, but when it crops up in others it often assumes a most repulsive aspect, and straightway clamours for its own removal. Such, at least, was my idea. I thought it worth a trial.

The first thing to be done was to secure a genuine kleptomaniac. With this object in view, I inserted in several of the daily papers the following advertisement:

"Wanted a kleptomaniac, who must be a lady of otherwise irreproachable habits and pleasing manners. She will be required to act as a companion to a gentleman's wife who is similarly afflicted. Duties light; remuneration liberal. Apply in the first instance to X.Y.Z."—care of a firm of advertising agents.

Notwithstanding the frequency with which such articles as books and umbrellas disappear, I had supposed kleptomania to be a very rare disease, and, moreover, one which few persons would care to own to. Imagine my surprise, then, at receiving fifty-seven answers to my advertisement, every one of the writers claiming to be a lady. From the nature of the case, I could not very well ask for references. Not that this mattered much, for I had enough confidence in my own judgment to think I could do without them.

I went through the letters with great care, putting aside all that tried to recommend themselves by shamelessly describing acts of successful pilfering. I had no hesitation in concluding these ladies to be impostors attracted by the salary.

There remained just five, who bashfully said they were considered by their friends to be kleptomaniacs, a statement which they did not themselves endorse in any way. Two of them—if I recollect right, for I have mislaid their letters—were elderly spinsters whom the world had treated badly; the other three were widows. All wrote

at great length, each urging, strangely enough, that because she was poor, therefore she had exceptional claims upon my consideration. From their letters it might have been supposed that each was the most unfortunate person in the universe.

In the end I decided to interview all five, that being the only way by which I could discriminate between them. Accordingly, I wrote to ask them all to come to my house on a certain day, and added that I would, of course, defray any travelling expenses. In order to prevent clashing, which I saw might place me in a most unpleasant position, I requested one lady to present herself punctually at eleven o'clock, another at half-past, another at twelve, and so on.

There would be no difficulty from my wife, for she was to be away from home on that morning. It had been arranged that a certain Uncle Joe should escort her to an exhibition which I had declined to attend. While I pitied Uncle Joe, who was a very irascible old gentleman, I certainly felt he had done me a great service on this occasion, though even here there might be fresh trouble in store. When confronted by an angry stall-keeper who accused him and his companion of stealing, he would, I was confident, be a magnificent spectacle. I was getting used to it, but it would be a new sensation for Uncle Joe.

When the morning in question arrived, I tried to bundle Maria out of the house with very unconjugal haste; but, notwithstanding all my efforts, her toilette required so much time that it was past eleven before she drove off.

The drawing-room, where I had decided to receive my visitors, was a large, pleasant, and comfortable room, with double windows looking upon the road. It was too full of knick-knacks, I thought, but that was my wife's doing. I had contributed only one article to the general collection—a small gold vase which a favourite mare of mine had won in a trotting-match. It stood on a cabinet between the fireplace and the window, a couch being just in front. At the end of the couch, and slightly in advance of it, I placed a chair for myself, intending my visitors to sit in the armchair opposite, where they would be facing the light.

When Miss White appeared, I was vexed to see that it was already half-past eleven, so that clashing was nearly inevitable after all. Let me say at once that she was a

very different woman from what I had expected. There was not a trace of hardness about her; a meeker-looking creature I never saw. In fact, I began to think there must be some mistake.

She was neatly dressed in black; in figure she was tall, thin, and rather angular, and she had a pinched face with a very mournful expression. When she first entered, she raised her eyes to glance at me and then at the room, but after that they fell, as if they were habitually fixed upon the ground.

Her intellect, I imagined, was a little dull, for she apparently mistook the seat I assigned to her, and occupied the couch. In self-defence I was obliged to move my chair farther away and face the light, which was not what I had intended. Without taking any notice of my action, Miss White laid down by her side a black bag which she had been carrying. Then she drew out her handkerchief, placed it on her lap, and folded her hands over it. In this attitude, with downcast eyes, she silently waited for me to begin—a most difficult thing to do, as I now found. As I tried to shape the necessary questions so as to be least offensive, I grew very uncomfortable.

"Ahem!" I said, "Miss White."

There was a knock at the door, and James, my factotum, entered.

"A lady to see you, sir," he announced; "a Mrs. Stone."

I fancied that Miss White raised her eyes reproachfully to my face, but they fell again the next moment. The idea that she had guessed the object of this second visitor, and felt herself to be subjected to a sort of competitive examination, only added to my embarrassment.

"Show her into the dining-room, James," I said, "and say I'll be with her in a few minutes."

"Don't mind me," said Miss White humbly. "Since the death of my dear parents I am used to being set aside for others."

"But, Miss White——" I protested.

"No, please don't apologise; I am not used to that. All my life long I have been trampled upon. I don't complain—no, I don't complain. I merely state the fact, as I think it only right you should know everything if I am to become an inmate of your house."

"Another lady to see you, sir," announced James; "a Miss Mildew."

Here was a pretty entanglement. What

on earth had brought her long before her time? Of course, that other woman in the dining-room would hear her, and know the meaning of her visit. I was growing very hot indeed.

"Show her into the library, James," I stammered.

"Don't mind me," again said Miss White, applying her handkerchief to her eyes; "please don't mind me. I'm used to being left alone. I'm only an unfortunate single woman, without a friend in the world. I think it only right you should know that also."

"Your parents," said I, making a frantic attempt to get to business, "were——"

"Most respectable people, but unfortunate. Yes; it's only right you should know that."

"Another lady to see you, sir," announced James.

This time the rascal was certainly smiling.

I knew quite well he was thinking of my wife. I knew, also, that her appearance upon the scene would just about finish me off; but I had no reason to apprehend anything so dreadful.

Miss White had a clearer idea of the situation. She looked at me in the same reproachful way as before, and then composed herself in that attitude of patient resignation which made me feel as if I were doing her a positive injury.

"What room is vacant, James?" I asked hurriedly. "Is any room vacant?"

"Only the boudoir, sir."

"Then show—who did you say it was?"

"Mrs. Dark, sir."

"Show her in there."

"Oh, don't let me detain you," said Miss White humbly. "I'm not used to detaining people."

And then, as if the thought was too much for her, this most depressing woman burst into a flood of tears.

By the time that my fifth visitor arrived, an event which happened very shortly after the arrival of Mrs. Dark, I was well-nigh distracted. There really was no room for this last woman. I could not have two of them gossiping together, and perhaps quarrelling, so I was compelled to ask Mrs. Heslop to wait in the hall. It was very rude; but what else could I do? Besides, such inconvenience as she suffered was entirely her own fault—her eagerness to secure the post having brought her two hours before her proper time.

"Miss White," I said, feeling at last secure from further interruption, "are you—pray excuse a necessary question—are you really a kleptomaniac?"

I put the question bluntly, because I was convinced that no woman who had so many tears at her command, could possess the coolness essential to successful pilfering, and my only object now was to get her out of the house. Instead of replying, she sobbed more bitterly than ever. It was distressing to watch and listen to her. Looking round desperately for some handle to use against her, I experienced a rude shock. My gold vase had disappeared!

From that moment my opinion of Miss White underwent a profound change. I rushed, perhaps wrongly, to the other extreme, and set her down as a most artful woman, whose weakness was assumed to cover her nefarious designs. Naturally enough, I felt rather sore on this point, for I placed a high value upon the vase. There could be no doubt as to what had become of it. For what other purpose could she have brought that suspicious-looking black bag?

"You have answered my question, I admit," said I, with a feeble attempt at jocularly, "in a very practical manner. I never saw you take that vase, Miss White; it was cleverly done, without doubt."

She dried her tears, and looked at me with mournful surprise.

"I'm not used to being told that I do things cleverly," she said. "You are the first who has told me that since my poor mother died. But what thing do you mean?"

"Why," I replied, trying to smile, "my gold vase, which you have put in your bag."

"Do you accuse me of stealing?" she asked.

Notwithstanding the flood of tears which she held in reserve somewhere, I saw then that there was fire in the woman. The doleful features hardened; the eyes glittered dangerously. She sat erect, but still with folded hands. Dreading a scene, I answered somewhat hastily:

"No, no; by no means. It is an excellent conjuring trick, but nothing more."

"Because," she said severely, "I am used to being insulted; I am used to being trodden upon; but I have never been so insulted or so trodden upon as that—at least, by a gentleman."

"Then," I said, when I could in some measure collect my thoughts, "you don't know what has become of the vase?"

"Sir, I have never even seen it."

"But—but—pray excuse my pertinacity; you came here as a kleptomaniac. Now didn't you, Miss White?"

"It's very hard," she replied, weeping again, "for a poor defenceless woman to be attacked in this way. But I don't complain—no, I don't complain, for I'm used to it. I came here in answer to an advertisement said to proceed from a gentleman, and I only wish I hadn't."

"And that advertisement was for a kleptomaniac. Really, Miss White, I must ask you to let me see your bag."

Crying bitterly all the time, but without a word, she handed it to me. I opened it and found it empty! I don't think that, either before or since, I have ever felt so crushed as I did at that moment, though my conviction that this shameless woman had got the vase was unshaken by my failure to find it.

"Please don't apologise," she whimpered. "Nobody ever apologises to me, no matter how deeply they have wounded my feelings. I'll say nothing about reparation—not a word. But after your unjust suspicions, I am fairly entitled to live here—under your eye, so that you may judge of me for yourself—and such duties as you give me I'll do uncomplainingly."

Could impudence go much farther than this? Here she was coolly founding upon the one robbery a right to live in the house and rob me at her leisure! Anxious as I was to get rid of her, I was still more anxious to recover the vase. But how was I to proceed? I could not call in the police and have her searched, for that would involve telling all about my unfortunate wife.

And now there burst upon me a thought which brought the perspiration out in great drops upon my forehead. In every available room in the house there was one of these desperate kleptomaniacs, who was doubtless thieving right and left.

"Excuse me one moment—only one moment," I said, and literally ran from the room, my intention being to create a scare and thus prevent any further depredations.

Mrs. Heslop, I felt, was harmless enough. There was but little damage she could do in the hall; so I hurried by into the dining-room, and caught Mrs. Stone in the

act of pillaging the plate-basket. She was a tall and handsome woman, with a remarkably self-possessed manner, for she advanced to greet me without the least sign of discomposure. Being in a most agitated state of mind myself, I scarcely know what I said to her, except that I should certainly be back before she could find a seat. Then I rushed away to the library, when the first thing that struck me was the disappearance of my ivory paper-knife. Miss Mildew, who was small and brisk, came smilingly out of a corner. But, without a word, I fled, thinking that by so doing I might alarm her more than by anything else.

"Go to the hall-door at once," I said to James, who happened to be passing; "and on no account let any of the five ladies out of the house until I tell you."

It really was a frightful scene that met my gaze in the boudoir. Mrs. Dark had discovered in an Indian cabinet a secret drawer of which I had had no knowledge, and this drawer had apparently contained a large quantity of jewellery, all of which I felt sure had been appropriated by poor Maria. In order to fill her pocket more easily, Mrs. Dark was seated upon the floor, with the whole collection of rings, bracelets, and brooches in her lap, and a paper in her hand.

She was a bushy-browed, keen-eyed, elderly woman, with very square shoulders and a slight stoop. A glance at her hard-featured face and coarse hands was enough to show that she belonged to a different class from those of my other visitors—a fact that rather surprised me, for her letter had been the most attractive of all. When I heard her speak, I was driven to conclude she had not penned it without assistance, if indeed she had had anything to do with it.

Strangely enough, too, she was the only one of the five who displayed the least sign of embarrassment at being caught thieving. She laughed, it is true, but the laughter had a very forced ring. However, she recovered much sooner than I did. After closing the cabinet, she crammed all the jewellery into her pocket, and rose to her feet.

"Looks fishy, don't it?" said Mrs. Dark, scrutinising me from head to foot.

"You are a very brazen-faced woman," said I, carefully keeping between her and the door. For if she were to get away, and pawn the things Maria had taken, there would be a terrible explosion.

"Well," said Mrs. Dark with an irritating pretence at resignation, "I suppose hard names are all in the day's work. What wages are you going to give me for this job of looking after your wife?"

I winced at this.

"Hand over the property you have stolen!" I angrily exclaimed. "You can't escape, for the door is guarded."

"That's all right. But stolen!" The abandoned woman was actually winking at me! "That's a hard word, too. How many kleptomaniacs have you got stowed about the house?"

"Five, including yourself."

"They'll carry off every stick of furniture if you don't watch them," said Mrs. Dark, laughing. "The very idea of putting them in separate rooms! It's just like a man. Shall I help you to make the others fork out? Set a thief to catch a thief, you know."

I jumped eagerly at this suggestion, hoping to come to terms with Mrs. Dark after the rest of my tormentors had been got rid of. She undertook the management, and, I must admit, went about her work in a very business-like way. In a wonderfully short space of time the six of us were collected in the drawing-room, all sitting down except Mrs. Heslop, who preferred standing. I supposed she was vexed at having been left in the hall, but the real reason came out presently.

"It's no use trying to soap it over," began Mrs. Dark, looking round the circle; "we're all kleptomaniacs. It's not our fault, of course, for we didn't make ourselves, so there's no harm in owning to it. And what we are is one thing, and what people think of us is another. How is this gentleman here to know I'm not a humbug? He advertised for a kleptomaniac, and he wants the real genuine article, I take it. But how is he to know he has got his money's worth unless he tests us? An incapable kleptomaniac would be just as bad as a vulgar thief. So, what I propose is that the five of us should empty our pockets, chignons, and such like places of resort for missing articles, for," said Mrs. Dark, smiling complacently at the other four, "I'll lay a tanner to a brass farthing, ladies, you've not been idle."

Though the terms of this proposal were considered objectionable, it was eventually agreed to, Mrs. Heslop strongly protesting on the ground that she had no opportunity of showing her powers. However, I told her that, unless she took part in the com-

petition, she would have no chance of being appointed to the post, and, as she had no valuable prize to set off against the salary, she recognised the expediency of yielding.

Mrs. Heslop was the first who was called upon to exhibit what she had got. And here a little difficulty arose which explained her objection to sitting down. It turned out that she had improved herself—that, I believe, is the correct expression—with my gong, and, accompanied by Mrs. Dark, she had to retire in order to produce it. A small picture and several pairs of gloves completed her spoils. She was very wroth with James, who, she declared, had grossly insulted her by stationing himself in the hall to watch her, just as if she were a common thief.

She had scarcely finished speaking when the door opened, and, to my horror, Maria walked in. What she must have thought of me, sitting there with these five women, I cannot even conjecture; for reasons which will be rendered obvious, the subject has never been discussed between us. She looked as if, by some mistake, she had entered the wrong house.

"I see you are engaged," she said at length, and was about to withdraw.

I was much too confused to speak or move. But Mrs. Dark begged her to remain, and she did remain. She sat down close to me, and watched and listened like one in a dream. I learned afterwards that Uncle Joe had had an attack of gout; hence Maria's return at an unexpectedly early hour.

There is no need to describe in detail the process of disgorging. Miss Mildew produced my ivory paper-knife, a number of stamps, several packets of post-cards, and two books; Mrs. Stone, very nearly the whole contents of the plate-basket; and Miss White, many objects of bric-à-brac, and—without a blush on her mournful face—my gold vase! All the things were laid on a table, which I had cleared for that purpose and set in the centre of the circle. As she gazed at her superior pile, Miss White put away her handkerchief and smiled, while the other three looked as if they could have eaten her.

"And now it's my turn," said Mrs. Dark pleasantly.

With which she emptied a huge pocket into her lap, and there came tumbling out all the jewellery which I had previously seen. Among it I noticed for the first

time Mrs. Arbuthnot's bracelet. In my dismay I could not help stealing a glance at Maria, but, except for a look of wonderment, her beautiful face was as calm as if the whole transaction had no interest for her.

"I think you'll admit, ladies," said Mrs. Dark with satisfaction, "that I've licked the lot of you."

There were arguments, of course; there were many reasons given for setting aside the verdict. And, when logic failed, abuse was poured out without stint. The four defeated ladies declared themselves to be the victims of an infamous conspiracy originated by Mrs. Dark. But in the end we escorted them to the door, and they departed, Miss White weeping copiously. Looking back at their conduct—which I can do calmly now—I must say that my only feeling is one of pity for them. I am morally certain that they had no more sense of wrong-doing than poor Maria has.

When they were gone I interviewed Mrs. Dark alone, for her behaviour had raised certain suspicions in my mind.

"May I ask your object?" I enquired of her.

"I have been put up to this job by the police."

"I thought so."

"Here," said she, bringing out the paper which I had already seen in her hand, "is a list of missing things, the last of the lot being a bracelet belonging to Mrs. Arbuthnot. And here"—pointing to the jewellery—"are the missing things themselves. I call that neat, I do. I'd made up my mind to a fortnight or more in the house, but an hour, you see, has done the trick."

Fortunately, I had no difficulty in hushing the matter up; and if it had effected a cure in Maria, it would have been the most welcome thing that ever happened to me. One would have thought that such an exhibition of kleptomania as she had witnessed would have given a salutary shock to her system, and turned her mind into a new groove. Alas! it did nothing of the sort; she is as bad now as she has ever been. You who have been endowed with a normal mind may feel inclined to blame rather than pity her. But I would beg of you to remember that your mind might have been constituted as hers is, in which case you would not and could not have acted differently. There may be a remedy for poor Maria's malady; if so, I should be very, very glad to know it.

THE ROSES.

Do they lie fading out upon the height
 The flowers we laid below the cross last night?
 Autumn forgets the glory of her sway,
 The east winds, moaning, sweep across the bay,
 And the low patter of the ceaseless rain,
 Sobbing against the clouded window pane,
 Falls, too, like one who in the twilight grieves,
 On my twined roses and their drooping leaves.

Tears seldom spring to cool the tired eyes,
 That in their time have seen the fall and rise
 Of fifty years of varying shade and shine;
 They are so weary, these poor eyes of mine!
 Yet they, who scarcely weep for change or loss,
 Fill for a foolish fancy; how the cross
 Stands steadfast, stretching its white arms in vain,
 Over his roses, dying in the rain.

BITS OF CHINA.

To the traveller who affords himself time for leisurely observation of the countries in which he travels, there is a peculiar fascination in the common, everyday life of the streets of every Chinese city, not only because of its many quaint and picturesque features, but also as affording curious glimpses of parallelism with or contrast to the customs of the Celestial Empire and other lands.

There is at least one custom which the Chinese observe in common with almost every nation under the sun—namely, that of giving and eating hard-boiled, dyed eggs at the spring festival. Some of these are artistically painted by hand, with elaborate mythological subjects. They are only to be obtained just at the time of the festival, and though the markets were well supplied with these just about Eastertime, I found it impossible to procure any a few weeks later, as the egg-merchants had no notion of supplying such things out of the proper season.

Another variety of egg-festival is celebrated during three days in the beginning of February, when, as on our own Shrove Tuesday, everybody, rich and poor, is supposed to eat pancakes. Again at Ningpo, on the fifth of May, I noticed that everyone seemed to be feasting on hard-boiled eggs, which, I was informed, was done with a view to averting headache in the ensuing twelvemonth—an appeal to luck akin to our custom of eating Christmas-pies with the same view towards the coming year. But the giving of hard-boiled red eggs is observed throughout China on the birth of a child, or the recurrence of its birthday, and seems to be the recognised symbol of good fortune.

Amongst many minor points of curious interest which arrested my attention while

slowly wandering on foot through many of the intricate streets of Foochoo, there was one of which I could obtain no solution, though my companion was well versed in details of Chinese custom—namely, that on the twenty-sixth of April, a small bunch of a weed, which appeared to me identical with what we call Shepherd's Purse, was bound with a bit of red rag, and nailed on to the upright posts of every window and doorway. Passing northward, to Ningpo, I was told that there, always just at Eastertime, all the people nail a branch of willow on their doors, because once, when the city was besieged, the General, having a brother living there, gave him this sign, which the soldiers were commanded to respect. The brother, not caring to be saved alone, instructed all his friends and kinsmen to adopt this token, and many other citizens followed their example, without understanding why, and thus many escaped massacre.

Whatever may have really been the origin of the custom, the season at which it is observed, and the bit of red cloth nailed to each door-post, can scarcely fail to suggest that bunch of hyssop—or small herb—dipped in blood, wherewith the lintel and side-posts of every Israelitish door were to be stricken that, "the Angel of Death, beholding the sign, might pass over."

The combination of the red cloth and the small herb also recalls the curious Levitical law for the cleansing of lepers, and of houses wherein is leprosy—the scarlet wool and the hyssop which were to be dipped in the blood of a bird that had been killed in an earthenware vessel over running water, wherewith the leper, or the house, was to be sprinkled seven times.

I do not myself know what plant is recognised as hyssop, but Archdeacon Gray mentions that, in Canton, on the day preceding a funeral, it is sometimes customary for a procession of priests, either Taoist or Buddhist, to march in gorgeous apparel through the streets along which the funeral is to pass, playing on rude instruments of music in order to exorcise evil spirits. The procession is headed by a young man bearing a small tub of holy water, and carrying in his right hand a bunch of hyssop, which he repeatedly dips in the holy water, and therewith sprinkles the streets and the floor of every shop, in order to drive thence any lurking evil spirits.

Whatever may be the mystic virtue attaching to the combination of certain plants with symbolic scarlet, we certainly

have it in our own British Isles, where, as we well know

Rowan-tree and red threid
Gar the witches tyne their speed.

Therefore does the careful Scotch cowherd tie a sprig of mountain-ash with red twine to the door of the byre, or twist a red thread round a cow's tail. For the same reason does a certain old horse-shoe, presented to me on the Hebridean Isles as an old family luck-shoe, now hang on my door entwined with scarlet braid and two twigs of rowan laid crosswise.

In China, in place of a horseshoe, the most efficacious thing to keep off powers of evil, is a sword-shaped toy, made of hundreds of copper cash ingeniously fastened together with red thread on a light foundation. This is hung above the bed in thousands of homes, as an effective safeguard. Charms written on red paper are found useful in frightening away devils, and fire-crackers, which are burnt for the same purpose, are made up in scarlet covers.

In building a house, a careful Chinaman—having first engaged Taoist priests to sprinkle the ground with holy water, in order to drive thence all bad spirits—takes care to provide a first-class piece of timber for a ridge-beam. Not only is this painted red, but it is decorated with festoons of red cloth, or, at least, with strips of red paper blessed by the priest, and smeared with the blood from the comb of a young cock, sacrificed for this purpose. From this ridge-beam is sometimes suspended a basket containing various symbols of good fortune, amongst others a hank of red thread.

This use of red as an amulet is widespread; it figures in the use of red cloth and red thread by the wizards of Mongolia, and also of certain aboriginal tribes of Hindoostan. It had its place in medicine-lore, too. Both in Scotland and in the West Indies red flannel worn round the throat is supposed to prevent whooping-cough, and in England we still sometimes hear of a red rag worn round the throat to cure toothache, or that a scarlet silk thread with nine knots, so worn, will stop nose-bleeding.

In Chinese stories, a peculiar virtue is attributed to red pills, and when a sick man is supposed to be afflicted by evil spirits, a geomancer writes a charm with a new vermilion pencil on yellow paper cut in the form of cash. He burns one of these charms, and swallows it in cold water, and places another over his door.

Then the exorcist—who is generally a Taoist priest, robed in red—ministers before a temporary altar, having in his hand a wooden sword made from a lightning-stricken tree; round this is wrapped a strip of red cloth.

It is not only the Taoist priest who secures the good influence of red. The torches which illuminate the great open court at Confucian midnight festivals are wrapped in scarlet cloth, and fastened on tall red poles. Red candles are burnt on Buddhist altars, and red dumplings are there offered. Red eggs are offered by women at certain shrines, and—at least, in Southern China—the ashes of Buddhist monks who have been cremated are sewn up in bags of red cloth.

In legendary lore, the mother of the great Lao-tze, founder of the Taoist religion, was fed daily, for a period of eighty-one years before his birth by a red cloud which came down from heaven; and earthly parents of the present day are careful early to enlist all good that emanates from red on behalf of a young child—certainly on that of a boy; girls are of small account. In the small boy his parents discern the future priest of the ancestral altar; so, when he is a month old, he is clothed in a bright red dress, receives his infantile name, and, his head having been shaved for the first time, he is presented with a cap on which are eight small metal figures representing the eight angels. He is also presented with a red chair and a red bedstead. As he grows older, his careful mother will see that his pockets are lined with red, and, on any days when evil spirits might come about, a red silk braid is entwined in the boy's long plait.

At a wedding in Northern China, the bride is carried in a sedan-chair covered with scarlet cloth, and the porters who bear her wedding-presents wear conical felt hats, each with a red feather sticking erect from the apex. In Southern China, wealthy folk have a wedding-chair, gorgeously gilded and richly decorated with little figures like blue and green enamel, but really made of the lustrous feathers of the kingfisher, exquisitely inlaid on metal—a dainty material which is very largely used for personal ornament. In this case, a red cloth, handsomely fringed, is thrown over the chair. Poor people have to be satisfied with a rude wooden bridal-chair, simply painted red, with a charm written on red paper suspended above the door.

The chair, which is sent by the bridegroom, is accompanied by his friend, or best man, who is the bearer of a letter written on red paper tinged with gold, entreating the lady to take her place therein. The bride is attired in a scarlet dress ornamented with gold, and the wedding-veil is of crimson silk. All her presents are carried in very showy red boxes by men in red tunics. Bearers similarly attired carry scarlet boards, on which, in letters of gold, are inscribed the names of the ancestors of both bride and bridegroom. Others carry, on long poles, large, handsome lanterns, each containing a fine red candle. Pigs, roasted whole, are carried on scarlet trays, and occasionally the bridal procession is headed by a goat with gilded horns and a garland made of red paper.

Among the numerous symbols which grace the marriage ceremonial in some parts of China are a pair of wild geese, which are sent by the bridegroom to the parents of the bride-elect, to typify mutual constancy, as it is supposed that these birds, having selected one another in youth, continue faithful throughout life, and that, should either die, the survivor mourns inconsolable.

As it is not always easy, even in China, to catch a wild goose and gander, tame ones are sometimes substituted, or sometimes, even, wooden or tin models, which are, perhaps, preferable at a wedding-feast, as the bridegroom's envoy has to enter the bride's house with a goose in each hand, and these are placed upon a table, where they are expected to sit still during the prolonged ceremonies!

Another emblem to be borne in the procession is a dwarf orange-tree, laden not only with its own golden fruit, but with many strings of cash, to typify both wealth and the much-desired children.

One of the ceremonies at a Chinese wedding is that two wine-cups are connected by a red silk thread, and are then drained by the bride and bridegroom.

Small presents of money are sometimes presented to guests, both at weddings and funerals, in crimson envelopes.

A wealthy Chinese funeral contrives to symbolise mourning by the aid of so many rich colours that one more or less might pass unheeded, were we not aware of the special attributes of the richly-embroidered scarlet pall which covers the huge coffin, and of the tall red poles to which are attached the flags and lanterns to be

carried in the procession, as also the great red boards on which are emblazoned the name and titles of the dead, and of his ancestors. A great scarlet umbrella is a marked feature in an official funeral. On the coffin itself is placed a decoration of red paper, on which is inscribed the character which denotes happiness.

On the other hand, during a season of national mourning, the ordinary red tassel worn on the hats of the officials is replaced by a white one, the red coverings of household furniture are removed, and blue or white covers are substituted. All red ornaments are taken off signboards, which are then adorned with white decorations and streamers of blue calico.

But really, there seems no end to the occasions when lucky red comes into play. On New Year's Eve scribes sit in the open street, driving a brisk trade by inscribing lucky sentences on red paper, which are bought by the community to paste on their doors on the morrow. Visiting-cards are printed on bright crimson paper. At the great official ploughing-match, which is held in the springtime in the neighbourhood of every city, as a special appeal to the god of agriculture, the great mandarins, assuming the dress of peasants, plough with red ploughs. In short, I know of no other country where so much symbolism is attached to colours; and red appears to have a monopoly of all good.

The free use of numerous gay colours at the funerals of great men is noteworthy as being one of those numerous contrarieties which meet us at every turn in the Celestial Empire, affecting matters of national importance, as well as the most trivial details of daily life, so that one is sometimes inclined to think that everything in China must of necessity be done contrariwise to our customs. For instance, look at the Chinese mariner's compass. The first which I bought as a curiosity, is a quaint, jewelled object, combining a sun-dial and a spirit-level, all in a silken case. Great was my astonishment on discovering the odd fact that the needle of the compass is made to point to the south instead of to the north! I suppose this is from some regard to the good influences of the south. My collection of oddities includes three compasses, bought in different provinces; but in each the needle points true to the south.

It really is amusing to note in how many things Chinese customs are diametrically the reverse of ours. We shake hands with

our friends, they shake their own clenched fists. Englishwomen cover their heads when they go out; Chinese women consider this very bad style—in fact, most objectionable. So, even when they do wear head-dresses, they are open on the crown. English gentlemen remove their hats in presence of honoured guests; Chinese gentlemen deem it courteous to keep the head covered. An Englishman of the present day likes to keep his hair close cropped; a Chinaman lengthens his long plait artificially, that it may touch his heels. A young Briton rejoices in the early stages of his beard and moustaches, but a Celestial knows that not till he is grey-headed may he indulge in the growth of such decorations. But when an Englishman does shave, he generally—at least, in England—is his own barber, whereas no Chinaman, however poor, would dream of shaving himself. He would consider that he was thereby demeaning himself. Of all contrarieties, one of the strangest is that a whole race should take the greatest pride in the said long plait and shaven forehead, which are simply badges of subjection, imposed on the nation only two hundred years ago, by the Manchu conquerors.

A young dandy of Europe considers his walking-stick an essential; in China the use of such a luxury is only permitted to aged and infirm persons. This law, which was passed in A.D. 903, replaced a far more arbitrary one, which prohibited any man under fifty years of age from carrying a walking-stick, but permitted persons who had attained that age to use one when within their own grounds. This, then, was a privilege accorded only to the wealthy. On reaching his sixtieth year a man might walk about his own town or village, stick in hand, but not till he arrived at the ripe age of fourscore was he at liberty to support himself at all times with a trusty staff.

Next to a walking-stick as the companion of an Englishman's rambles comes his dog. Instead of a dog the Chinaman carries his caged singing-bird, which he takes out for a daily airing, and you may sometimes see a considerable number of most respectable-looking, portly citizens thus engaged. To them the musical bird becomes a much-prized companion, whereas the dog is merely the guardian of the house.

In the matter of games, British children play battledore and shuttlecock with their hands. Chinese boys use their feet as the battledore, and occasionally catch the

shuttlecock most expertly on their forehead. In England, when it was customary to put offenders in the stocks, it was their feet which were imprisoned. The Chinese equivalent is the cangue, the huge wooden collar, or, rather, large square board with a hole in the centre, through which is thrust the head of the criminal.

In riding, we hold the bridle in the left hand, a Chinaman holds it in the right. We have our address printed on the face of a neat, small visiting-card. If a Chinese visitor deems it necessary to note his address, it is inscribed on the back of the very large piece of crimson paper which does duty as a card.

Our doctors are content with feeling the pulse in one wrist; a Chinaman feels both, as a preliminary to feeling many more, for he recognises four hundred and one distinct pulses. We deem the right-hand side to be the position of highest honour; the Chinese places his most honoured guest on the left.

With us, advancing years are very commonly ignored—especially by ladies—but the Chinese of both sexes glory in the age which is the surest passport to honours, and the height of courtesy is to assure your guest that from his or her appearance, you would have taken him or her to be much older than the age stated. This again implies a curious diversity in custom, for, whereas we should scarcely deem it courteous to ask a stranger how old he or she is, it is almost the first question asked by a polite Chinaman anxious to show honour to his guest.

Then, too, in the matter of mourning, white takes the place of our sombre black, and though chief mourners wear sackcloth, all other relations of the dead wear white garments, and form a long procession, walking two and two. The coffin is ornamented with bands and rosettes of white calico; the chief mourner carries a staff entwined with strips of white cotton, and white streamers are attached to the sign-board of the house of business of the dead. Hence, to the uninitiated Chinaman a white flag of truce would suggest a symbol of death, while to cover a dining-table with a fair white linen table-cloth would convey to him precisely the same sensation that we should experience were a covering of black crape selected to grace a wedding-feast.

One peculiarity of a Chinese wedding-feast, by-the-by, is that the bride and bridegroom wait upon their guests, handing them

tea or other refreshments, and the bride assuming the character of a servant, waits at the banquet provided for her husband's parents and distinguished guests.

When a Chinese home has been blessed by a small addition to the family, it is customary to hang up a bunch of evergreens, as a sign to all comers not to approach the house (in consequence of a law of uncleanness very similar to that of the Mosaic dispensation). This symbol acquires interest, from the fact that other nations recognise this sign as conveying an invitation to all comers. Our old English proverb, "Good wine needs no bush," alludes to the bushes of evergreen, which, suspended from the signpost of the hostel, invited all to enter and drink. The identical sign, generally a great ball of fir-twigs, calls the attention of the wayfarer in Japan to the rice-wine shop where so hearty a welcome awaits him.

I almost think that to this catalogue of varying customs I might add the passion of grown-up men for kite-flying—not that Chinese boys do not glory in their kites, but that their seniors are equally keen in this pastime, which is made a medium for keen betting. The kites are made of every conceivable form, and sometimes of enormous length. Birds and beasts, butterflies and flower-baskets, wonderful fishes, monstrous centipedes, insects, full-rigged junks, fierce dragons with huge rolling eyes, and tigers' heads, are among the favourite forms. Some are tailless, some are adorned with floating tassels. Some are made to sing louder than any humming-top, by having several small metallic strings affixed to the centre, and through these the breeze murmurs as they fly. Sometimes a very pretty game is played by flying one gigantic kite shaped like a hawk, while a whole flight of small kites represent a crowd of affrighted birds.

Like everything else in China, kite-flying has its appointed season. Then thousands of people all over the empire go out with their kites, and make their way to the nearest hills or rising ground, where they have a day's jollification, and conclude by cutting the cords of their kites, when high in mid air. The kite acts as a sort of scapegoat, and sails away to the desert fields of air, carrying with it whatever ill-luck might else have been in store for the family which it represents. Whether a favourite kite may safely be retrieved, I failed to learn.

CHRONICLES OF ENGLISH COUNTIES.

SURREY. PART II.

OF rural Surrey, Guildford may be accounted the chief centre; an ancient and pleasant town, with a high-street of gabled houses sloping steeply down the hill to the river Wey, which winds its course among floury water-mills and weather-boarded breweries, where the little flock of pleasure-boats that are tethered to each other and the shore, give a pleasant English aspect to the stream. On one side a steep chalky lane gives access to the downs, which here break off in a fine escarpment, with the old Norman keep perched on the brow of the hill; while down below, where ancient quarries have been worked in the face of the cliff, rude caverns stretch far into the bowels of the earth.

A pleasant seat, called Warwick's Bench, connected by tradition with some former Earl of Warwick—the great King-maker one would like to think, although there is no record of his connection with the town—affords a view of the sweet vale beneath, rich woods, fertile meadows, and the river winding in many a link and fold.

About the castle-keep there are many definite historic associations. It had not come into existence when the young Saxon Prince Alfred, Ethelred's son, and the grandson of the guilty Queen Elfrida, inheriting the curse pronounced upon the children's children of the murderess, came to an untimely end with his Norman body-guard at the hands of Earl Godwin's men. The Prince and his followers had, no doubt, landed at Portsmouth or Southampton from one of the Norman ports, and were on the march to London when intercepted; and that we are on one of the old vantage-points between London and the Hampshire ports, we are reminded by the old telegraph station on the height that dominates the castle-keep itself—a kind of square tower, now a dwelling-house, from whose flat roof once rose the tall semaphore with its beckoning arms, whose movements so often announced in other days a victory on sea or land.

But the castle—whose extensive compass embraced many existing villas and gardens, and whose bowling-green is still in existence, or was till lately, and gave its name to a little inn—the castle was a favourite residence of two Eleanors: of her of Provence, the Queen of Henry the Third, and of her daughter-in-law, Eleanor of Castille.

And we hear in the sheriff's rolls of a great hall, and the King's great chamber, and a chamber with a raised hearth and chimney, a wardrobe and closet, and a small oratory to be built at once for "the use of our dearest daughter Eleanor, the wife of our eldest son Edward", and of the Queen's guard-chamber, and her enclosed herb-garden; while William the Florentine was master of the works, and painted as well the pictures and frontispiece of the altar of the great chapel. After the Plantagenets the castle seems to have been abandoned by royalty, and some part of the enclosure became the county gaol.

Whether the caverns below have any connection with the castle is a point which has not been satisfactorily settled. Perhaps, after the fashion of Mortimer's hole beneath Nottingham Castle, a secret passage may have existed between them. A curious story is told of the prison days of the castle, when the Governor employed two or more of his prisoners in sinking a well in his garden. With a sufficient watch kept at the mouth of the well, the governor might think his prisoners safe enough, but it seems that the well-sinkers in the end came upon the cavern, knocked a hole in its roof, and escaped, perhaps the only instance on record of an escape through the bottom of a well.

Perhaps the original object of these caverns was to quarry the hard chalk of the lower beds, a stone—if stone it may be called—that was in mediæval times extensively used in building, especially for interior columns and mouldings. Good examples of this chalk work may be seen in the church of St. Mary's, not far from the castle; and also in many of the parish churches of the neighbourhood, nearly all of the early Norman period.

There was a good deal of cloth-making once done at Guildford, which shared the fate of the same industry in Kent and Sussex. And it was a clothier of Guildford, named Abbot, living in the reign of Elizabeth, who had three sons, as in the fairy tale; and the after-history of the three sons is almost as strange as fiction. One became Archbishop of Canterbury; the second only reached a bishopric, that of Salisbury; the youngest became Lord Mayor of London, and was knighted by the King. The Archbishop did not forget his native town, but built a fine quadrangular set of almshouses, with hall and chapel and master's lodge, for the poor of Guildford—a handsome Jacobean building

of red brick, which is still occupied for its original purpose.

To the north of Guildford lies a country of heaths and commons, with villages here and there, where the streams have created green meadows—such as Ripley, with its famous green, Chobham among its ridges, and Bagshot on the border of its famous heath. Then there is Woking, with an ancient royal mansion on a branch of the river Wey, about a mile below the town. The river Wey branches out a good deal about here, making a kind of labyrinth of streams and water-courses, a capital place for a camp of refuge in the days of old. And here, on a plateau of firm ground among the streams, was built Newark Abbey; the site had been Aldbury before, and likely enough a stronghold of the early inhabitants of the land. The Aldbury had given place to the New-wark, probably a Saxon fortified camp, and on the site one of Cœur de Lion's barons founded a priory for Black Canons of the rule of St. Augustine. The rude core of the old priory church is all that is left standing, a somewhat bare and melancholy ruin. Ockham, too, is worth a visit, for its interesting church; and farther to the east lie the Horsleys, east and west, with a mansion that once belonged to the Raleighs, with the tomb of the last of the line, the disinherited Carew Raleigh, in the church, where was found, it is said, a detached skull, believed to be that of Carew's father, the famed Sir Walter.

To the south of Guildford the country is far more picturesque and diversified. South of the chalk downs lies a range of bluff headlands that rise from a sea of land; the broad Weald with its opposite shore in the blue downs that mark the Sussex coast, even with a glimpse here and there through gap or fissure, of the real, beautiful, shining sea beyond. The valley beyond the chalk ridge and the sand buttresses is especially pleasant.

On one hand the chalk downs show their broad-backed ranges, their sides chequered with dark and mystic groves of box, of yew, and of aged thorns, within whose circles the Druids may have performed their secret rites. On the other side are the hills, feathered with woods to their summit—Leith with its tower, Ewhurst with its mill; while a solitary bluff is crowned with the stern-looking and ancient chapel of St. Martha. Within this vale lies Albury, with its little cathedral of the Catholic Apostolic Church,

where the lamp burns night and day before the sanctuary; and in the pleasant village you may meet angels, evangelists, and apostles of the order in their rustling robes. For here at Albury Park was the seat of Henry Drummond, the banker, one of the great pillars of the Irvingite Church. And then comes Shere, one of the pleasantest of English villages, with Wotton beyond, where the trees that John Evelyn planted line the sides of the romantic ravine that leads up to the highest point in all the country round. And among these woods lies the fine old-fashioned red-brick mansion of the Evelyns; still occupied by the collateral descendant of the well-known author of *Sylva* and the *Diary*.

In a pleasant nook close by, shaded by beautiful beech-trees, lies Wotton Church, in the porch of which John Evelyn received his early schooling, and here in the south aisle of the chancel he lies buried.

High above church and village the commanding brow of Leith Hill affords a magnificent prospect of the wealden country below, with a tower planted on the summit, from the top of which tower it is said that a glimpse of the sea may be had between a gap in the South downs. Indeed, the tower, which was built by one Richard Hull in 1766, is said to have been erected for no other purpose than to afford its eccentric founder a distant glimpse of the sea and the white sails of its ships.

The hill of Leith with its tower, and of Ewhurst with its windmill, are conspicuous objects in all the landscapes round about, and the range of heights terminates towards Guildford with the rugged sides of Blackdown, dark and gloomy-looking in the brightest sunshine. Then comes a gap that opens out into the fertile plain to the south, with a chain of pleasant villages dotted along the highway: Womersley, where there were clothiers once, and a trade in blue cloth, which was woven for the Canary Isles; Bramley, with some nice, old timbered houses that have seen better days, and which likely enough were the homes of stout and wealthy clothiers; and Cranley, too, with its noble green—one of those old-fashioned spacious village-greens that helped to make the famous cricketers of the southern counties. Here was the original seat of the Sidneys, simple country gentlemen till they gained fame and fortune in the wars with the Scots, and removed to the more aristocratic shades of Penshurst. Hereabouts are the remains

of sundry fine old seats among groves of fine and venerable oaks; such as Vacherie, which was once the grange belonging to the manor-house of Shere, and Baynards, once occupied by a kinsman of John Evelyn. Here is a pleasant, drowsy land traversed by a single line of rail, with trains that scarcely seem to rouse the neighbourhood from somnolence, and an old dead-and-gone canal that once did a little trade in barge-loads of faggots, bricks, or farmyard manure, and had a certain picturesqueness about its weedy banks and decayed, gaping lock-gates.

The birth and death of this quiet and sleepy canal may be here fitly recorded.

"In 1811," writes the painstaking historian of Surrey, "a proposal was made to form a junction between these rivers"—the Wey, that joins the Thames at Weybridge, and the Arun, that meets the tide of the English Channel beneath the stately towers of Arundel—"by a canal of seventeen miles in length. The estimate was seventy-one thousand two hundred and seventeen pounds, but, to meet every expense, it was reckoned at ninety thousand pounds. The Earl of Egremont subscribed twenty thousand pounds. An Act was passed in 1813, and the work is begun." To which it may be added that the Wey and Arun Canal finally expired of inanition, and was closed by direction of the Court of Chancery, in July, 1871. Its course may still be traced here and there in weedy pools, haunted by pike and tench, or in channels where cattle love to wade in hot, drowsy summer weather.

A few miles farther on, the quietude of the neighbourhood culminates in the village of Aldfold, still a place for folding sheep, where lookers—a prosaic kind of shepherd without crook or pipe, except the humble pipe of clay—exercise a sort of pastoral hospitality towards the sheep and lambs of the upland districts, and take them in at so much a head to board in the fat marshes of Sussex.

But if we follow a different line, not widely divergent, we come across a more bracing air and a more lively race of inhabitants. The soil makes all the difference; heavy clay is replaced by friable sand, and the human intellect at once responds to the change.

First we have Godalming, with the fine buildings of the new Charterhouse Schools, on the slope of a hill overlooking the river—Godalming, that alone of the Surrey towns retains an industrial character. Once noted

for cloths and kerseys, the town is still connected with the manufacturing districts, and the click of the stocking-loom may be heard in its factories, while the paper-makers haunt its pellucid streams. There is a roomy old church, with ancient Norman mouldings within, and, without, a curious wooden spire and a pleasant churchyard looking over the lush meadows. Of this church the Rev. Owen Manning was once vicar, who died in 1801, at the age of eighty-one years. A painstaking searcher was Manning among ancient records and musty parchments, and an eager collector of anything that bore upon the annals of the district, and he left a fine collection of materials which he had intended to embody in a county history. These materials were arranged by William Bray, a scion of the ancient house of the Brays, of Shere, but himself a lawyer, and the author of sundry tours and topographical descriptions, in which he followed the model of worthy Pennant. The work thus completed is known as Manning and Bray, and is one of the best and most complete of county histories, where manors are traced, from the time of Domesday downwards, with scrupulous fidelity, and where there is still a good deal of honest and amusing gossip and general information.

Nobody who writes about Godalming can omit a reference to the one sensational event in its annals—the strange story of Mary Tofts, which exercised the minds of the quidnuncs of Charles the Second's days, when Mistress Tofts claimed the distinction of presenting to the world a litter of rabbits in the place of ordinary offspring!

About Godalming lie a group of pleasant romantic villages—Elstead, Thursley, Witley, and others, much resorted to by artists, who have built quaint Elizabethan and Jacobean houses and cottages in many a pleasant nook; while a wild stretch of breezy heath and common surrounds the cultivated tracts, and the hills of the green-sand formation culminate in the massive brow of Hindhead. Here are the Devil's Jumps—strange, isolated mounds among the rolling heath-lands—about which uncanny superstitions still linger. Nor was the eerie reputation of the place at all diminished when an astronomer, of European reputation, here set up his abode, and excavated an observatory in the midst of one of the Evil One's own hillocks. A wind-gauge waved its arms from the lonely height, and day and night the clank of a steam-engine echoed among the hills, while its hoarse

puffing seemed like the breathing of some imprisoned spirit. The astronomer is now dead, and his elaborate apparatus has been sold, but the story which is told of his life and death is not out of keeping with the weird sadness of the surrounding landscape.

There are pleasant sequestered valleys leading from this wild moorland, with meadows and snug homesteads, where the murmur of streamlets and the songs of birds are in the air, and one of these happy valleys was the scene of an eighteenth-century story that is not without pathos and dramatic interest. The hero was the son of a farmer among the downs of Hampshire. It was sheep-shearing time, and the farmer and his son were busy shearing their sheep, when an unwelcome visitor appeared in the form of a bailiff who had come to arrest the old farmer for a debt. The son, fired at the sight of the man's rude hands laid upon his father's person, struck out with the shears he held, and dealt the bailiff a fatal blow. The young man, horror-stricken at his deed, turned and fled. He escaped unseen over the lonely downs, and found his way to the still more lonely heaths of Surrey. Here chance threw in his way a farmer riding home from market with his buxom daughter behind him on a pillion. The farmer, as it happened, was in want of a servant, and liked the looks of the stranger—and the daughter, too, had a word to say for the handsome young fellow, who was thereupon hired, and followed his master to his new home.

The farmer's man proved a treasure—honest, sober, and industrious; all his master's affairs prospered under his management, and his master's daughter cast kindly eyes of affection upon him. Conscious of the brand of Cain that was upon him, the poor fellow long steeled his heart against her evident fondness; but the girl would not be denied.

And when a woman woos, what woman's son
Will sourly leave her till she do prevail?

Thus it came to pass that they were married, and lived happily, and children were born to them, when one day they were visited by the farmer's scape-grace nephew—a former admirer of his pretty cousin, who, for want of better employment, had become a sheriff's officer. Some trivial matter aroused this man's suspicions, and he found that his new friend's appearance corresponded with the description of the man pursued by hue and cry for the murder of the bailiff years ago.

Men were brought from the scene of the murder, who identified the runaway. He was brought to trial at Guildford assizes, and although the whole countryside came forward to testify to his character, the evidence of identity was too strong; the verdict was guilty, and sentence of death was passed. Even then a rescue was apprehended, and the services of an armed guard were secured to escort the condemned man to the gallows—at the foot of which he took leave for ever of his heartbroken wife.

At that time the usual place of execution was an open field on the flank of the steep chalk down that rises behind the town of Guildford, and is continued in a long, narrow edge, known as the Hog's Back, which runs in this way for six or seven miles, affording on either hand a succession of charming views of the surrounding country, while, gleaming in the far distance, may often be seen the glassy domes of the palace of Sydenham. The Hog's Back ends among the hop-grounds of Farnham, where Moor Park, although much modernised, recalls memories of Sir William Temple and his poor relation and private secretary, Jonathan Swift. In a pleasant, sunny spot by the river, near the site of Waverley Abbey, is a house known as Stella's Cottage, which local tradition assigns as the habitation of Hester Johnson.

Waverley itself is worth a visit, although there are but scanty remains of its once famous Cistercian monastery, the first of the order to be established in England. It was when on a visit to the then proprietor of Waverley that Walter Scott was struck by the happy resonance of the name, and adopted it for the hero of his first prose romance. There is a good deal in a name, as everybody knows who lives to please the public taste; and thus the author of the Waverley Novels was under some obligation to the old monks who gave their abbey this pleasing title.

As for Farnham itself, the history thereof is chiefly connected with its castle—eminently the Bishop's castle—originally built by Henry de Blois, the warlike Bishop of Winchester. Farnham, indeed, has been in the hands of the Bishop ever since the days of Ethelbald, King of the West Saxons, who made over the whole hundred to the see of Winchester. And, although moat and donjon seem a little out of keeping with our modern ideas of a Bishop, yet there is something highly suggestive of the church militant in the conjunction. The castle was a defensible stronghold till it was

taken and dismantled by Waller on behalf of the Parliament in the Civil Wars. Then, after the Restoration, the castle was rebuilt in the quaint and picturesque style of the period, and, with its mixture of old and new, with its commanding position, and with the groups and avenues of noble beech-trees about it, forms a very interesting and pleasing ensemble.

The little river that flows briskly by the castle comes, in its course, to a bridge, beyond which is a modest public-house, which an inscription identifies as the birth-place of William Cobbett. The man himself, never reticent about his own affairs, has described the place more than once; and no one can equal Cobbett in a description of the pleasant country that was so familiar to him. Possibly, had Cobbett set about his task of writing his itinerary in due form, with an eye to the picturesque and graphic, he would have made a failure of it; but, going about with his head full of currency abuses, the great Wen—London to wit—and other matters, and turning only incidentally to the country he passes through, he has made his *Rural Rides* one of the classics of our language.

Cobbett's tomb is in the churchyard of Farnham—a highly respectable monument of freestone, surrounded by crowds of less-distinguished memorials.

It would be a kind of *lèse majesté* to leave Surrey without taking notice of its modern capital—the rising town of Croydon, recently chartered with municipal privileges, although the town is fast losing its provincial character and becoming an outlying suburb of London. And it is difficult to realise that Norwood itself was once in reality, as well as in name, a wood “where the inhabitants of Croydon had herbage for all manner of cattle and mastage for swine without stint.”

Then there is Addington, now the favourite residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury, the manor of which was formerly held by the King's cook, for the service of providing a mess of pottage for the King's feast.

Nor should the famous Surrey downs be forgotten, with Banstead Downs, now mostly enclosed, whereon once stood The Oaks public-house, that was purchased by General Burgoyne, and converted into a country-seat, and afterwards sold by the General to his fidus Achates—Lord Derby. And from the sign of this humble public-house came the name of one of the great races of the year on Epsom Downs.

COUNT PAOLO'S RING.

A SHORT SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER XL.

"ANGELA, are you ready? The carriage is waiting, and mother growing impatient."

"Quite ready, Nancie—I am coming."

There was a murmur of admiration from the servants in the hall as Angela came down the wide staircase. Her dress was white; she had a great bouquet of white azaleas and lilies, which Sir Noel had sent that morning from Covent Garden, in her hand. Round her beautiful throat was a single string of pearls; she wore no bracelet, or pins, or flowers in her hair. The golden tresses were indeed sufficient ornament; the carnation of her lips and the vivid flush upon her cheeks supplied all the colour necessary to complete her toilette. Nancie looked at her with delighted eyes. She had not thought it possible that anyone could look as lovely as this radiant creature, with her flushed face and dark, shining eyes, and she felt quite sorry that Sir Noel could not be present to witness her triumph.

"How lovely you look, Angela! How proud Noel would feel if he could see you!" she exclaimed. "I do wish he could have come."

Angela flushed guiltily at the words. She was conscious that she did not share in Nancie's wish—that, on the whole, she was glad of Noel's absence.

"Yes, it is a pity—I am sorry," she said absently.

The two girls were in the drawing-room waiting for Mrs. Monteith to come downstairs. Nancie walked to the mirror and looked at herself. She looked very charming and bonnie in her pretty green and white dress, but she laughed and shook her head comically as she looked.

"What do my looks matter! Who will bestow a glance on me when by the side of such magnificent beauty?" she said merrily.

"Nonsense; you will make me vain! But, Nancie," and Angela's face grew strangely earnest, "tell me truly, do you think I have improved since I came here, that I am prettier now than I was three years ago?"

"Prettier? Yes, ten times prettier!" Nancie said decisively, and Angela gave a relieved smile. She remembered how in the old days Paolo had loved to praise her beauty. Would he think her as fair now as then? she wondered; and then she glanced

in the mirror, and the beautiful face which met her eyes answered the question.

The first part of that evening passed like a feverish dream to Angela. She was conscious that she was very much admired, that she had far more partners than she cared to take; that admiring looks and whispers followed her every movement; and that Mrs. Monteith was smiling in bland triumph over her protégée's success. She was fully alive also to the honour which befell her later on in the evening, when no less a personage than the royal Duke himself besought the honour of a dance, and paid her courtly compliments. She was pleased after a fashion with it all, and glad to see Nancie's pleasure; but her partners found her oddly absent and silent, and not half such good fun as Miss Monteith. And more than one, as he noticed her great eyes travelling round the room and eagerly scanning the face of each new arrival, wondered for whom she was watching.

The same thought occurred to Lansdell, who, as he was not dancing, had plenty of time for observing his neighbours. How oddly excited Angela looked, he thought; and why did she watch the door so incessantly? He noticed that in the square dances she always contrived to stand where she could see the people enter or leave the room, and he could not divest himself of the notion that she was expecting someone. But who could it be? He fancied also that as the evening wore on, although she still watched the door as eagerly as ever, that her eager, excited expression changed to one of disappointment and weariness. She lost her bright look; her eyes grew sad under their dark brows; the bright colour faded from her face.

But all at once, as he watched her, it returned. Her cheeks flushed rosily; her eyes dilated, and grew so wonderfully bright and happy that Lansdell was half dazzled with their strange radiance; and her lips parted in an exquisite smile.

Lansdell looked round eagerly, but he could see nothing likely to account for the sudden change. A few late arrivals were, indeed, just then entering the room, but they were the sons of a Barlaston manufacturer, and he knew that their presence or absence was a matter of perfect indifference to Angela. But leaning against the doorway was a tall, stately-looking man, with a dark, foreign face, and snow-white hair, which contrasted strangely, but by no means unpleasantly, with his black moustache and beard. He leant against

the doorpost, stroking his moustache, and watching the dancers with a quietly amused expression.

Lansdell noticed his distinguished air and brilliant eyes, and the stately grace of his bearing, and he turned to his next neighbour, a lady, and asked if she knew his name. She looked, and shook her head.

"Some Italian or Greek, I suppose. There are plenty of all nations here to-night," she said lightly. "He is very handsome, is he not?"

"Very; but rather odd-looking."

"Who is he watching so intently? Oh, of course, like all the men, he is admiring the new beauty," the lady laughed.

"What, Angela Monteith?"

"Of course—who else? Are not her praises on every tongue to-night? And no wonder. She is a beautiful creature."

Angela had just taken her place in a quadrille then forming, and, as usual, had chosen a position which faced the door. The tired, disappointed look, which had attracted Lansdell's attention, had quite vanished now. She was smiling brightly as her partner bent over her, and whispered some low-toned compliment. She smiled, but Lansdell doubted if the smile was meant for the admiring young man by her side.

There was a little pause just then in the dancing. The Duke had requested that a set of quadrilles, composed by a local professor of music, might be substituted for the set originally chosen, and there was a little delay while the Master of the Ceremonies informed the musicians of the change in the programme. Angela looked across the crowded room. Her eyes met Paolo's brilliant eyes. They smiled at her with the old tender kindness, the old chivalrous devotion, which she remembered so well—which brought back the past to her so vividly. Once more her heart beat with passionate gratitude and affection, and delight that the time had come when she might prove that affection, and fulfil her vow. She looked across the room, and their eyes met in a long, steady gaze. Slowly she drew the glove from her left hand. Still with her eyes fixed on Paolo's face, she lifted her hand to her brow, and held it there a moment, as if to shield her eyes from the glare of the gas.

Paolo's eyes flashed. He looked eagerly at the white hand, at the thick gold ring that shone on her third finger, and he smiled brightly, and gave a quick sign that he saw and understood,

"Brave little heart. She has not forgotten—she is faithful still!" he murmured to himself.

As soon as the quadrille was over, he crossed the room and came to her side. She was standing with her late partner in a recess near one of the windows, fanning herself languidly. Her face changed as she looked up and saw Paolo, and it was with difficulty that she repressed the cry of delighted welcome which rose to her lips. He bowed courteously.

"May I hope that mademoiselle has not forgotten her old acquaintance, Rosannio?" he said quietly, yet with a warning look in his eyes. "I was presented to mademoiselle in Nice by her friend, Dr. Antonelli."

Angela gave a quick, comprehending glance, then a gracious smile.

"I remember you perfectly, monsieur. Any friend of the dear doctor must be a friend of mine," she said, with a little excited thrill in her voice.

Her partner, a tall, fair young man, strongly imbued with the true Englishman's contempt for all nations but his own, twirled his moustache, and looked ineffably disgusted. He had flattered himself that he had made a favourable impression on the belle of the evening. She had laughed and talked in a more animated fashion with him than with any of her previous partners, and he was hoping to persuade her to give him another dance by-and-by, and now this rascally foreigner, with his bright eyes and white hair, and general "queer" look, had come to interrupt the conversation! Young Hilyard felt sure, as he watched Angela turn to M. Rosannio, that all his chance of another dance was at an end.

"Has mademoiselle a dance to spare, or am I too late?" M. Rosannio said.

Angela looked down at her programme.

"I have one—the lancers, monsieur."

"The lancers? Ah, I fear I am not sufficiently au fait with your English dances to attempt that," monsieur said, with a shrug of his shoulders. "And I am tired. I would rather not dance it. We will sit it out instead. Truly that will be a pleasure."

"And you, monsieur," and Angela smiled sweetly, "shall tell me news of my old friends."

Paolo bowed again, with the graceful, stately air which made Mr. Hilyard writhe with rage and jealousy. What airs these confounded foreigners gave themselves, and what fools girls were to be taken in by them! he thought savagely, and he drew

himself up stiffly, and scowled at the unconscious object of his wrath.

"And when is this dance to take place, mademoiselle?" Paolo went on.

"The third after this, monsieur. There is a valse, a galop, then ours."

"A thousand thanks, mademoiselle."

Paolo turned away just as Nancie passed with her partner. She paused, and looked after him with an interested face.

"Who is your charming foreign friend, Angela?" she said.

Angela blushed faintly, and looked down at her bouquet.

"It is M. Rosannio, an old friend of Dr. Antonelli's," she said quietly.

"Oh, I hoped it might have been the veritable Count Paolo himself," Nancie said lightly. "What a handsome man he is! He looks like a disinherited prince—like a hero of romance—like——"

"An Italian conspirator at a third-rate theatre," Mr. Hilyard, interrupted rather spitefully.

"Not at all like that." Nancie glanced at Angela and smiled to see the look of supreme scorn that passed over her face at Mr. Hilyard's last words. She did not condescend to make any reply, only curled her lip and smiled disdainfully. "He is the handsomest man in the room, at all events," Nancie went on calmly; "better than handsome—distinguished. I never saw anyone I admired so much. The contrast between his dark eyes and moustache, and his snow-white hair, is simply charming. What brings him to Barlaston, Angel?"

"I don't know; I have scarcely spoken to him yet."

"I wonder where he got his invitation? That is the worst of balls like these," Mr. Hilyard grumbled; "it is impossible to keep them select, some snob or other is sure to push his way in——"

He stopped, utterly annihilated and silenced by the flash of Angela's great eyes. They rested for a moment on his face, then drooped languidly, and a quiet little smile passed over her face. She unfurled her fan, and waved it to and fro with an air of placid indifference. "Snobs—select!" It was too absurd to hear this Barlaston woollen manufacturer speak thus of Paolo Ostrolenka, the descendant of the ancient Polish kings! Mr. Hilyard looked and felt supremely uncomfortable. He attempted a clumsy apology.

"I hope you did not think I was referring to your friend, Miss Angela," he said hurriedly; "I was speaking generally."

Angela gave her quiet little smile again, but she did not answer in words, and Nancie's partner, who did not like Mr. Hilyard, smiled maliciously at his discomfited face.

"Put your foot into it there, old man, and no mistake!" he whispered, as Nancie drew Angela aside and spoke to her in a low voice. "See, your friend the foreigner is talking to old Sapienza." He named a Greek merchant of very high standing in the town. "Look how pleased he seems. Your foreign friend must be some big swell or other to call forth such lively demonstrations of delight from Sapienza. Why, he is the proudest fellow I know! He will scarcely condescend to visit any of the merchants here."

"Oh, these confounded foreigners always hang together!" Hilyard growled.

"Perhaps Miss Angela's friend is staying with Sapienza," the other young man went on. "I am going to dance this waltz with her, and I shall make a point of admiring M.—what the deuce was his name?—and cutting you out of her good graces. Though, indeed," and he laughed, "you seem altogether out of the running."

Indeed, for the next few minutes, Angela remained blandly unconscious of Mr. Hilyard's existence. She laughed and talked to Nancie and her partner, but she manifested but the very faintest interest in the remarks which her late partner meekly made from time to time. Angela was offended, and showed her wrath plainly, much to Nancie's amusement and Mr. Hilyard's discomfiture. He left her by-and-by with his friend, to whom she was engaged for the next dance, and went into the refreshment-room, and, while standing by the table, saw Angela's friend enter with the Greek merchant.

Hilyard scowled at the two foreigners with angry, jealous eyes. He pushed past them so rudely that Paolo stared, and shrugged his shoulders, and made some sarcastic remark to his friend respecting the courteous manners of the English—a remark which was spoken in Paolo's most correct English, and in his most melodious voice, and reached, as it was intended to do, Mr. Hilyard's ears. He cast another wrathful glance behind him, coloured, frowned, and went on his way, imbued with a still greater hatred and contempt of foreigners in general, and these two in particular, and a greater sense of British superiority than ever.

It seemed to Angela as if that waltz and

the galop that followed would never come to an end. She danced each through with scarcely a pause from beginning to end, much to the delight of her partners, who were both enthusiastic dancers. It was easier to dance than to talk, Angela thought, and how was it possible to keep up a conversation about trivial, commonplace matters when her thoughts were full of Paolo and their coming interview?

What would he ask of her? How was her promise to be fulfilled? she wondered, With every moment that brought nearer that momentous interview her excitement grew greater. The sight of Paolo's handsome face had revived a thousand old remembrances in her loyal heart. She was ready to do anything, to go anywhere, to brave any danger. For the time Sir Noel was almost forgotten; Paolo had but to hold out his hand, to say the word, and she was ready to cast all else aside, and to follow blindly and obediently where he led.

The flush of excitement in her cheeks, the fire of enthusiasm in her eyes, gave a strange beauty to her lovely face. People turned to stare at the stately young beauty, as she crossed the room on her partner's arm, with wondering admiration; and more than one of the great county ladies asked her name, and expressed great surprise when told she was the niece, or a near relation, of Mrs. Monteith, the stout, rather vulgar, and extremely complacent-looking personage in purple velvet who sat by Lady Sara's side.

"That person's niece? Well, I am surprised! She has such a distinguished air," Lady Adela de Dournay said, putting up her eye-glass, and staring at Angela as she passed with calm impertinence. "What a sensation she would make in town! It is to be hoped she will marry well. Has she money?"

"I think not; but she is already engaged. She is to marry Sir Noel Clarige in the summer."

"Indeed! I know Sir Noel well;" and Lady Adela stared with still greater interest at the girl's tall, graceful figure. As she looked, Paolo approached and offered his arm to Angela, and her lovely face glowed, and her luminous eyes grew still brighter and more beautiful than ever, as she turned to him and placed her hand on his arm.

"Is there by chance any place where I could speak to you alone, mademoiselle?" Paolo whispered.

Angela hesitated a moment, then remembered that, at the farther end of the entrance-hall, she had noticed a door leading into a kind of verandah, which had been fitted up as a conservatory, and lighted with Chinese lanterns. Once or twice during the evening she had been invited by her partners to inspect this place, but she had always declined. Now she remembered it gladly.

"Yes; take me across the hall to the conservatory," she said hurriedly. "It will be quieter there, at all events, than here."

"Here! Truly one cannot hear one's own voice," Paolo said, with his favourite little shrug. "But you will take cold, mademoiselle. Can I not get you a shawl?"

"I have one here."

Angela pointed to a gold-and-crimson wrap which lay on the chair by Mrs. Monteith. Paolo brought it, and folded it carefully round her shoulders.

"Shall we go?" he said, offering his arm.

Angela's heart beat swiftly as she took it. Silently she crossed the hall by his side, and entered the little conservatory. It had been a favourite resort earlier in the evening, but now many of the visitors were at supper, and more were dancing, and it was quite deserted. The lamps were swinging to and fro; the air was full of the heavy fragrance of gardenias and hyacinths. Through the windows the pale moonlight streamed upon the bank of flowers above Angela's head; it touched her golden hair, and glanced on her earnest face, and on her bright eyes, as she turned towards Paolo.

"Monsieur, tell me—you have need of me at last!" she cried. And her voice thrilled with excitement and ecstasy.

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